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JOURNALISM, POLITICS AND THE UNIVERSITY.*

BY THE EDITOR.

UNFORTUNATELY, no definition of journalism has yet found general acceptance, and none probably could be made that would stand the test of critical analysis. Its most famous exemplars achieved power and distinction by methods so varied, and from motives so diverse, as to render exact induction impossible. To Franklin, the printer, it was a trade; to Bryant, the poet, it was literature; to Greeley, the apostle, it was evangelism; to Raymond, the disputant, it was polemics; to Bennett, the cynic, it was manufacture; to Dana, the satirist, it was an art; to Godkin, the caviller, it was hypercriticism. Each earned and won renown in a manner peculiar to himself, not because he was a great journalist, but because he was a great man—and in this respect of actual, personal achievement the name of Garrison, the zealot, leads all the rest. In breaking the bonds of traditional political thralldom, these eager minds rendered superb service to the cause of free thought and independent expression, but in one or more of the essentials of true journalism in its highest and broadest meaning each was singularly deficient.

THE MASTER JOURNALIST.

The master journalist must have stability of purpose and coolness of judgment. Greeley had neither. Impulsive, erratic, heedless in thought, violent in expression, eager to lead, no matter whither, impatient of restraint of any kind, the mighty influence acquired by his undoubted genius, reinforced by public faith in the purity of his intentions and the worship even of his obvious faults by the multitude of his followers, was wielded for ill almost as frequently as for good, and more than

* The substance of the Bromley Lecture delivered at Yale University on March 12th, 1908.

once seriously imperilled the very existence of the nation which he loved with the fervor of a votary.

The master journalist must have perspective as well as perception; his is a jealous calling demanding the exercise of every mental and moral fibril, and exacting above all that consistency which is inseparable from conviction. Keen and brilliant as he was, Raymond could make no discrimination between essentials and non-essentials when opportunity for contention offered. Peddler or archbishop could draw his fire by the merest allusion; no threat of controversy was too absurd, no source thereof too insignificant, to absorb his entire interest and distract his attention from public affairs. Yet more serious was his subordination of a great journal to the petty purposes of a political party, in the machinery of which he most prided himself upon being one of a hundred cogs—hence his variability of policy, which became a byword and sapped his authority.

The master journalist must have conscience, character, conviction; his aim must be to uplift humanity, not to profit by its degradation. Bennett had personal integrity; he never sold an opinion; he never cheated or lied or bowed before mammon—and he was the most energetic and successful gatherer of news the world has produced. But he was indifferent to principle, contemptuous of things held most sacred by his fellow beings, and strove solely to detect the trend of popular sentiment that he might hasten to please the mob and pay additional tribute to his great and only god—Success! a curiously complex, marvellously self-developed manufacturer of food and poison, pill and labelled to gratify any palate and to meet all conceivable demands.

The master journalist must cherish no personal animosities; though relentless in pursuit of wrong-doers, he must be just and forbearing when vindictiveness could only inflict pain upon the innocent and serve no useful purpose. Dana was the prince of his craft, the skilled workman, the artist, the developer of style, the first and so far the last hand at the loom from which spins the finished product. To the intensity of his nature we must attribute the unforgiving spirit which marred a professional career otherwise unmatched in proficiency.

The master journalist is suggestive, constructive. Godkin's talent was great and facile, but his instrument was the rapier; his hand never knew the trowel.

SAMUEL BOWLES.

A significant omission from this enumeration of men, the mere mention of whose names even in illustration of their defects evokes recognition of their distinction, is that of Samuel Bowles. It was not inadvertent; it was deliberate and purposeful. Bowles embodied a combination in greater or less degree of the finest qualities possessed by his famous contemporaries. Though in the view of the people he was less appealing than Greeley, in fact he was quite as earnest, quite as enthusiastic, quite as resolute in determination to supplant wrong with right at whatever hazard. His expression, except upon rare occasions when excitement burned through his veins, was less vivid, less brilliant than Raymond's, but it was always forceful, always rang true, and his discernment never wavered from the line of accurate diagnosis and the logical remedy. Unlike both Greeley and Raymond, he was able to curb his natural impetuosity and enhance by his very restraint the ultimate effect of his utterance—and his sound, sane judgment always sat at his elbow. He was not and could not have been, under the same conditions, a peer of Bennett in the gleanings and purveying of news; his didactic instincts were too dominant, his other interests too varied; but in his comparatively circumscribed field his work was characterized by no less painstaking thoroughness. His editorials lacked the finish that stamped those of Dana and Godkin, because his intellectual training was derived from association with men, while theirs came from intimacy with books. But take him all in all as a journalist, and few essentials will be found wanting. He was bold yet not daring for daring's sake, conscientious, both high minded and broad minded, firm in conviction, self-respecting, considerate of the weak, independent of the strong, unsordid, resolute in purpose, lucid, direct, convincing, able to perceive with the quickness of a lightning flash, to comprehend with the wisdom of a sage, and to deduce conclusions that seemed irrefragable to other minds because so they were felt to be by his. Despite the restrictions imposed upon him, it will not be surprising if the history of his generation shall accord first place in American journalism—as journalism pure and simple—to Samuel Bowles.

Herein we find a lesson. If it be true that Bowles outranked his gifted contemporaries, retaining to the end a truer perspective

and sounder judgment, his pre-eminence obviously cannot be attributed to either mental or moral superiority; it must have sprung necessarily from another underlying cause. Such, in truth, is the fact. Bowles was free. Almost all of the others at some stage in their careers wore the shackles of personal political ambition. Greeley was a fitful aspirant to public office from the day his journal became a power, and he died, finally, broken-hearted by his inability to attain the Presidency, for which hardly a man then living was less fitted. Raymond, after years of active participation in practical politics, perceived the folly of his course and foreswore further entanglements, only, however, to discover that the habit had become irresistible, and at the time of his death he was chairman of a State committee. Dana's life was embittered and his judgment clouded by the refusal of a President and a Governor to recognize his personal claims. Even the incorrigible Bennett was hushed by the offer of a diplomatic mission. From the day when the first note of independence was sounded to the very present, the bane of journalism has been the political ambitions of the journalists themselves. Politicians have profited steadily and increasingly, and the public has suffered correspondingly, from this insatiable craving for public position. Nor have our foremost statesmen hesitated to avail themselves of the opportunities thus presented. President Lincoln may have been warranted in considering that the end justified the means when he offered to Bennett the ministry to France, but his act served only to silence criticism of Johnson when that President tendered the Austrian ministry to Raymond in return for support which could not otherwise have been obtained. To this day not only has the custom been maintained, but, judging from the fact that never before have so many editors and writers held appointive political positions as at present, it seems by no means to be waning.

The fitness or unfitness of those selected is not a point in issue. It is the practice only which we deprecate. And call it what we may—a bribe to ensure a continuance of allegiance or, less obnoxiously, a reward for services rendered—the outcome of every one of such transactions is the same, the people's loss of a champion, and a newspaper's sacrifice of its birthright for a glittering bauble.

What, then, shall we conclude? That an editor shall bar acceptance of public position under any circumstances? Yes, abso-

lutely, and any thought or hope of such preferment, else his avowed purpose is not his true one, his policy is one of deceit in pursuance of an unannounced end; his guidance is untrustworthy, his calling that of a teacher false to his disciples for personal advantage, his conduct a gross betrayal not only of public confidence, but also of the faith of every true journalist jealous of a profession which should be of the noblest and the farthest removed from base uses in the interest of selfish men.

JOURNALISM AND POLITICS IRRECONCILABLE.

There is but one conceivable conclusion in logic or in morals, namely, that true journalism and the politics that seeks personal advancement are not and cannot be made co-operative; from the radical difference in their very natures and the impossibility of reconciling what should be the idealism of the one with the practicalism of the other, they must be essentially antagonistic. That in fact they are is evident. The chief, if not indeed the sole, aim of the politician is to win the favor of the majority. To achieve this purpose he does not scruple; in the language of his craft he "keeps his ear to the ground," and the magnitude of his success is measured by the shrewdness with which he divines popular tendencies sufficiently in advance of their general manifestation to appear to be the leader of a movement to establish newly discovered principles rather than a skilful conjecturer of evanescent popular whims. It follows necessarily that the journal animated by any other than a like motive, that is, the desire to profit from pandering to mobilized selfishness, is so hateful to the aspiring politician that in his view it must be discredited. Hence the frequency and virulence of assaults upon newspapers which for one reason or another dissent from views expressed by politicians, sometimes no doubt in sincerity, but always in hope of currying public favor. The reasoning of such a journal is seldom combated; a mere questioning of its motives is deemed and generally is found to be vastly more efficacious. So it often happens in even these enlightened days that a newspaper undergoing no change in control may to-day be pronounced patriotic and devoted to the cause of the people and to-morrow be denounced as a servant of special interests and an enemy of the country, in precise accord with its defence or criticism of political measures and men.

One of our most conspicuous statesmen—if the term, despite its apparent obsolescence, may still be applied to the holder of a high public office—recently declared that the sole mission of journalism is to detect and encourage popular tendencies. In truth, such a conception is the basest imaginable, but it is the politician's and probably always will be. Nor can we honestly deny that it is the easier and likely to prove more profitable and more comfortable. Surely any one possessing human sensibilities would rather be heralded as a tribune of the people than as a hireling of capital, a panderer to labor or a common mercenary—and yet such detraction is a form of misery that the politician may avoid, while the journalist must endure it, for the simple reason that the god of the one is expediency, and of the other, principle.

I do not criticise the politician for following the mob; success in his trade is dependent upon his ability to satisfy the cravings, whatever they may happen to be at the time, of the majority; nor do I complain of his pretending to lead when really he only follows by catering to prejudice, since it is well within his province to deceive as many of the voters as much of the time as his talents permit. Even his traditional championship of, and appeals to, the "common people" may be condoned. So many millions have not only borne with equanimity but accepted with gratefulness for so many years that transparent insult, that its constant repetition engenders mild amusement rather than the deep indignation which rightfully it should evoke. My sole purpose is to mark the complete antithesis in theory and in practice of journalism and politics, in order to emphasize the inevitable antagonism to which I have referred between a profession that should be noble and a trade that is essentially sordid. To be the first to detect and the most eager to satisfy popular caprice is the acme of personal political achievement; to protect the people from themselves, to point out their errors and urge rectification, is the true mission of journalism. "Gathering the wisdom of ages as into a sheaf of sunbeams, it shows that progress springs from the minority, and that if it will but stand fast, time will give it victory." Into a single familiar stanza Bryant, the journalist, compressed the battle-song:

"Truth crushed to earth shall rise again;
The eternal years of God are hers;
But Error, wounded, writhes with pain,
And dies among his worshippers."

The distinction lies between dependence upon and independence of the majority—and in this respect great strides have been made in American journalism. The asperities of to-day seem innocuous when compared with those of the good old times when charges of treason filled the air, when Republican journals solemnly accused Federalists of plotting to establish a monarchy by force of arms, when Federalist newspapers denounced Republican statesmen as Jacobins, when Jay was anathematized as a scoundrel and Jefferson as an atheist and satyr, and when, as on the morning after Washington retired from the Presidency, the principal organ of the Opposition devoutly thanked God that at last the country was rid of the man who had been the source of all its misfortunes. Even so late as the era of the brilliant men to whom I have referred, public journals were the slaves of political parties, but whatever the shortcomings of the present, the pall of partisanship at least has lifted, and there is no press in the world comparable to that of America in freedom from venal influences.

PROVINCIALISM OF THE PRESS.

“A chartered libertine,” the American press may be as distinctly to-day as when the discriminating Curtis so designated it twenty-five years ago, and yet, how true it is now as then, as he hastened to add, that “No abuse of its privileges can be so great as the evil of its suppression.” There remains only the necessity of refining the expression and enhancing the independence which constitutes the real soul of a public journal. At this point exacting human nature raises obstacles. The vast majority of men are technically honest, but few are honest in their minds. So, too, while all really influential newspapers are nominally independent, few proprietors and editors are unaffected by one consideration or another. Environment wields the greatest force, and so it should. It is right and proper, no less than inevitable, that a newspaper should reflect the sentiments of the community in which it has its being, and upon whose support its very existence depends. In the fact that a journal published in a manufacturing city in New England upholds protection, or that one speaking for the farmers of the West advocates free trade, or that one printed in New York demands rigorous laws bearing upon finance, we find no cause for censure. Each voices the spirit of its own community in perfect conformity with the democratic theory which forms

the basis of our institutions; but it is a grave question whether at this time, when the bands of steel have knit so closely together the various sections and rendered all so wholly interdependent, the growth of tolerance and consideration has kept pace with material progress. Provincialism has ceased to be dominant in American journalism, but it continues to be a factor of no little magnitude, irritating, harmful, even pregnant with danger unless modified by a broader recognition of the rights and privileges of all who constitute a mighty population that must be united to withstand the baleful forces which hitherto have wrecked republics.

TRUE INDEPENDENCE.

The journalist, then, must be independent, not only of politics, but of his community. His interest is its interest, but his entire obligation is not fulfilled by mere representation of that interest, however accurate it may be. He is, above all, a teacher who through daily appeals to the reason and moral sense of his constituency should become a real leader. Nor should his independence be confined within city or State lines. His responsibility is to the whole people, but to perform fully his part he must be independent of the whole or of any portion. Nothing can be clearer than that the occasional supersession of statesmen in public authority by heralds of dubious evangels makes doubly important the rigorous application of common sense to even an uncommon people. Above capital, above labor, above wealth, above poverty, above class and above people, subservient to none, quick to perceive and relentless in resisting encroachments by any, the master journalist should stand as the guardian of all, the vigilant watchman on the tower ever ready to sound the alarm of danger, from whatever source, to the liberties and the laws of this great union of free individuals.

CAN JOURNALISM BE TAUGHT?

Can such an ideal be attained through education? Or, as is often asked, Can journalism be taught? Greeley not only dismissed the suggestion contemptuously as unworthy of consideration, but even went so far as to decry the academic training of the intellect, and he prayed for deliverance from "those horned cattle, the college graduates." The scholarly Dana also maintained that the only successful school of journalism is a newspaper-office; and this, I suspect, would be found upon inquiry to be the opinion of practically all journalists now in the front

rank, with one notable exception. But will the common saying that a journalist is "born, not made," stand the test of analysis? Is it any more than assertion? Has any one ever tried to demonstrate its truth by process of reasoning, or could one hope to succeed in such an attempt in these days of wider and freer intellectual development in the universities? True, the familiar declaration that journalism cannot be taught as surgery or engineering is taught seems plausible, but is it indeed the fact? We may grant that certain technical knowledge respecting the mechanical construction of a newspaper can be derived most easily, if not solely, from actual experience; but that experience can be obtained as well without as within a newspaper-office if the facilities be afforded. This form of proficiency, moreover, is of the smallest comparative value, and bears a relationship to the practice of journalism as a profession hardly closer than the ability to conduct an advertising department. Surely, too, one can be taught how to write, edit, think, even how to perceive, as readily in a college as in a newspaper-office, the only conceivable advantage of the latter being that—of inestimable value, to be sure—which is derived from enforced practice; but even this cannot be regarded as unattainable, if the mental energy and ingenuity said to be exercised by some undergraduates in striving to avoid work could be diverted into other channels.

SELF-EDUCATION.

There is no novelty in the interminable parading of the exclusive or superior advantages of service in the "hard school of experience." Such prattle has issued from shallow intellects since systematic training of the mind began. We hear it at intervals even now from the lips of men whose self-sufficiency, flourishing like a noxious weed amid flowers of material achievement, prompts a tawdry display of dogmatism. That results alone constitute arguments, is their confident declaration deemed to be conclusive, and any lingering doubts are supposed to be quickly dispelled by contemplation of the handiwork of the complacent self-manufacturer. It is difficult at the beginning of the twentieth century to listen to such absurdities without manifesting impatience; and yet we may not with propriety disregard the obligation of tolerance in considering the opinions of men incapable of fixing the bases of their own prosperity. What

logic would pronounce effect they almost invariably believe to be cause, and the most obviously helpful circumstances win no recognition from their restricted imaginations as salutary or even contributory to equipment for achieving success. Examples without number, from Cavour, whose monument is united Italy, to Lincoln, whose glory is emancipation, are adduced as evidence that time utilized in training the intellect is wasted, and that liberal education is a bar to possible achievement through concentration. Wholly similar is the common misapprehension respecting the training of an American journalist deduced from the triumphs of Franklin, Greeley, Bennett, Bowles and some now living. Scorning to make the obvious retort, disdaining to instance the innumerable contrary examples from Pericles to Balfour, from Bacon to Godkin, it serves well our purpose to raise the simple query, whether the successes of those mentioned were accomplished because of or in spite of disadvantages that to the impersonal judgment seem apparent.

RESPONSIBILITY OF THE UNIVERSITY.

But all these are minor considerations. It is in a vastly broader sense that I shall try to show that if it be true that, in these days, a printer's devil who works his way up to an editorship is better equipped for the practice of journalism than a college man having like aspirations, there is on the part of trustees and faculty a woful deficiency in comprehension of the duty of the university to the people. Assuming general acceptance of the hypothesis that the power of the press for good or ill is very great and not diminishing, it is manifest that all available agencies should be utilized to render that influence as much for good and as little for ill as possible. Of these instrumentalities many might be enumerated, but not one, in this particular stage of commercial, scientific and moral development of the American people, can approach the university in effectiveness. We call this an age of specialism, and such indeed it is in all callings but one—and that one is journalism. We have only to refer to the stupendous and constant growth in population within our borders and the recent lightning-like expansion of our interest abroad to emphasize the fact that never before was such need of breadth of knowledge among those charged with the daily teaching of our millions.

Whatever may be our attitude towards the doctrine of "utility,"

whether we stand with Oxford or with Edinburgh, we may rest assured that not even Locke would deny the need to the modern journalist of liberal education, for the very simple and conclusive reason that universal knowledge is his requirement. And where can he obtain it if not from the university? And whose duty, if not the university's, is it to supply not only that liberal education itself, but also all minor helps pertaining to journalism, so that when the graduate begins his work his mind need not rust while perforce he is mastering the mere incidentals which constitute the sum of the knowledge of his office-bred competitor?

Hardly second in value to wide comprehensiveness of knowledge are clarity in thought and lucidity of expression; and from whom may we rightfully demand the development of these acquirements if not from the university? Criticism is an important function of journalism, but only a phase. It does not suffice to walk in the footsteps of the sages who taught Rasselas and the princes of Abyssinia, and who, according to Doctor Johnson, told them of nothing but the miseries of public life, and described all beyond the mountains as regions of calamity where "discord was always raging and where man preyed upon man." The ability to apprehend the correct viewpoint concerning a vital subject is vastly more important, calling not merely for the bodily eye provided by nature, but for what Newman so aptly designates as "the eye of the mind," whose object is truth, and itself is "the work of discipline and habit." Where, if not to the university, may we look for the maintenance of the discipline and the forming of the habits essential to the training of the intellect to so fine a point that, in subsequent public service, which is all that journalism really is or should be, discrimination between the true and the false shall require so little effort as to seem to spring from very instinct?

Journalism can never be history; its unceasing activities deprive it of the advantages of scientific inquiry. It cannot even be the rounded truth, since the necessity of prompt presentation of what seems to be fact renders impossible the gathering and weighing of all evidence which bears upon an event that must be chronicled. As a purveyor of what we call news, the newspaper cannot present daily a photograph of happenings; it can only give a picture, imperfect because painted by fallible beings. As a guide, it must form opinions and pronounce judgment instant-

ly; the delay of a day or even an hour at times would be fatal to full effectiveness. Hence the necessity for the most complete and finished mental training; and where, pray, can we look for the building of thoroughbred minds if not to the university?

INTELLECT, CHARACTER, CONSCIENCE.

Intellect! Independence! Each is essential and each can be cultivated. There is yet another trait whose possession is more vital than that of both combined. That is character, the foundation of all real achievement, which in turn finds its inspiration in a quality fortunately inherent in all men. The equality with which, according to our republican doctrine, human beings are endowed in common at birth is the equality of right alone—the right to exist unmolested, to enjoy freedom, to share evenly with others the opportunities vouchsafed by God to His children. The capacities to feel, perceive and express multifarious emotions which in the course of years crystallize into genius, talent or mere industry are distributed in widely varying degrees. No training of the mind can evolve a poet, no cultivation of the sense of hearing can create an understanding of music, no practice can imbue a sterile spirit with appreciation of humor. With respect to these and all similar attributes, so far from all being born equal, no two among the uncounted millions are born alike.

But there is one divine possession common to all men, from the most highly educated to the most ignorant, from the most spiritual to the most brutal, from the finest to the coarsest of natures. It is the faculty which compels men to regard their own acts and the acts of their fellows as possessing a moral quality, and which, when fully enlightened, puts upon the right the imprimatur of its conscious approval and upon the wrong the stamp of its conscious condemnation. In Christian theology it is the still small voice speaking a word of warning when such an one is needed; in modern philosophy it is the moral sense, conscience or, most exactly to the discriminating understanding, the spirit of truth. What it is we do not know. Whatever it may be, believers and scoffers alike admit its existence in every human breast—as a force, though latent, the most potent known agency in the control and direction of human conduct; and it is this element, this divine spark, that smoulders or leaps into flame, as it is neglected or encouraged, that becomes the core of character.

But while character is as dependent fundamentally upon the impelling force of conscience as the human organism is upon the pulsing of the heart, other qualities, although secondary in importance, are no less essential to the entire composition. Chief among these is a sense of personal honor. This trait can be acquired only through cultivation, which in turn is most naturally and readily realized through the traditions and associations afforded by the university. The motives which engender it are various and not inevitably, in the nicest sense, wholly worthy. The primary teaching, for example, that honesty should be practised simply for the sake of policy does not seem to conform with the spirit of high-mindedness, and yet it is too often the sum of the reasons derived from early secular schooling. The prompting of pride or even of the form of vanity which impels the wish to stand high in the estimation of one's fellows is far more meritorious, and it is this impulse which stirs within a man from the day on which he comes into contact with the standards which have become fixed by practice within the university. To the moral atmosphere of the gridiron and the baseball field, hardly less than to the shame of reflecting discredit upon one's Alma Mater, may safely be attributed the keen sense of personal honor to-day found almost invariably in the college graduate. And, if it be conceded, as it must be, that university life produces nobleness of mind, it is but a step to the conclusion that it must also refine the conscience, and it thus makes the perfect blend which we call character,—the first and indispensable requisite of true journalism.

FOR TECHNICAL INSTRUCTION.

Already, as we have seen, the university is building the fundamentals. Why should it not also supply the accessories and send forth to teach and lead the people, men so thoroughly equipped technically as well as mentally and morally that the mere fact of graduation, by opening the door of opportunity, would gradually but inevitably tend to subordinate materialism to a practical idealism which would raise the American press to its true position as foremost among God's agencies for the uplifting of the American people?